

Fall 8-15-2012

## ENG 4950-001: Literary History

Stephen Swords  
*Eastern Illinois University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english\\_syllabi\\_fall2012](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2012)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Swords, Stephen, "ENG 4950-001: Literary History" (2012). *Fall 2012*. 119.  
[http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english\\_syllabi\\_fall2012/119](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/english_syllabi_fall2012/119)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 2012 at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2012 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).

Literary History/English 4950 Fall 2012

Stephen Swords 217-367-6253 [sswords@eiu.edu](mailto:sswords@eiu.edu)

Coleman 3020 office hours-Tuesdays and Thursday 10:45-12:30, 2:00-5:00

Literary History is intended to be a capstone class for your career as an English major here at Eastern where you can use skills that you've developed in your other courses, ask some big questions about literature and the way it works in our world, and take stock of what your experience of studying literature and language has meant to you.

The class is designed with two basic parts. First, we'll be reading as a group a body of literature centered around Barbara Kingsolver's novel, a truly fine book set in Africa. We'll read some non-fiction, some British and African fiction and work with some film and other materials to create a context for Kingsolver's work in such a way that the interplay of texts will tell us much about the vital connections between history and art, one artist and another, and how we as readers and students of literature can put this all together.

Second, each of you will work on something best called the personal bibliography project, in which you will draw up a list of that which you have read, both in and out of school, and then write a reflective autobiographical essay on what all this reading and study has meant to you. This project will be explained in more detail later, but it is an interesting assignment that many students have done over the years that I have taught this class, and I can guarantee you will find it rewarding.

Rules and regulations:

1. Late stage English majors should know the importance of reading the material. Failing to do so will not work out for you. Doing so will.
2. Late stage English majors should know the importance of coming to class and being part of the conversation. Failing to do so will not work out for you. Doing so will.
3. I may ask you to do some writing specifically about *The Poisonwood Bible* and related texts, but the primary written work is the personal bibliography project. Failing to take it seriously will not work out for you. Doing so will.

## Literary History Personal Bibliography Project

The purpose of this project is to enable to take a good long look at your own history as a reader and student of literature. Since everyone is nearing the end of their college careers and anticipating what will come next, this is a good time to take stock of what you've learned as an English major, what your experience has been like both as a student and a reader, and what might lie ahead for you in your vocational and personal life to come.

The project has two parts as follows:

1. **The List.** For this, you will need to draw up a list of what you have read, primarily during your college career, but often people include significant reading that they've done either before college or on their own. The goal for the list is to achieve reasonable comprehensiveness, i.e. individual title of stories, novels, poems, plays, critical works, films, papers that you wrote, and so forth—the raw materials that have made up your education as an English major. For each item on the list, you'll need the author's name with that person's birth and death dates, along with the date of publication or composition. To track this stuff down, people have often used old syllabi, various internet resources, reference works available in the library, consultations with former professors, and good old fashioned memory. While this may seem like drudgery (and it will at times), what will also happen is that as you collect this information, you will find yourself remembering all sorts of things about the various works you've encountered, what it was like to read and study them, what the class was like where you met them, and other things of that nature. Remember that at this point, the list is just a list, with only the basic bibliographic information. Once you've gotten the list together in a rough way, you'll need to figure out some way to organize it in some coherent fashion. People have figured out all sorts of ways to do this and part of the work of this assignment is to work out an order that makes sense to you and serves some purpose of your own. Sometimes, people have used some simple, obvious pattern—by class, by genre, by year in school; other times, people have come up with something creative—menus, topical categories, different sorts of reading experiences, etc. Organize the list in whatever way seems interesting to you, and I'm fine with it as long as you have reasons for doing what you did. Also make sure that your organization has some depth to it like a classic outline, so that things aren't just lumped together. Simple alphabetical or chronological order is not enough.
2. **The Paper.** Once you've collected and organized the list, you'll write a reflective autobiographical paper, essentially "My Life as an English Major," in which you discuss significant (or perhaps not so significant) works, experiences, insights, preferences, and whatever else seems relevant to coming to terms with your overall experience as a student of literature and writing. People tell me that most of what turns up in the paper either comes up in the process of creating the list or while writing the paper itself, and though this is a different sort of writing experience from other classes, it proves rewarding and not at all difficult to do. Make sure you mention as many specific texts as possible and spend some time with them explaining why and how they matter to you. The average length of these papers is around 10 pages or so, though I will certainly read as much as you turn in.